

Message Text

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SUBJECT: RIOTS IN RAMALLAH

REF: STATE 266678

1. ISRAELI OFFICIALS IN TOUCH WITH RAMALLAH SITUATION HAVE TAKEN LINE WITH US THAT DEMONSTRATIONS HAVE BEEN CONFINED TO RAHALLAH-BIRAH-BIR ZEIT AREA AND THAT PARTICIPATION HAS BEEN LIMITED TO STUDENTS, WITH SOME SCHOOLS NOT INVOLVED AT ALL. THEY EMPHASIZED THAT DEMONSTRATIONS HAVE BEEN MUCH SMALLER THAN THOSE FOLLOWING ARAFAT UN APPEARANCE LAST YEAR.

2. MFA OFFICIAL(ARIEL), WHO WAS ALREADY AWARE OF SMITH ARTICLE, BELIEVED THAT PRESS MAY HAVE OVERPLAYED USE OF FORCE BY IDF. IN HIS VIEW, DEMONSTRATIONS CONTINUED FOR SEVERAL DAYS ONLY BECAUSE MILITARY GOVERNMENT WAS "PATIENT". HE SAID STUDENTS ARRESTED HAD BEEN SENT HOME, BUT "A FEW" WOULD PROBABLY BE BROUGHT TO COURT AND FINED FOR THEIR PARTICIPATION IN ROCK THROWING EPISODE. POLICE MINISTRY OFFICIAL (DANON) ADDED THAT TROOPS DID NOT BECOME INVOLVED UNTIL STUDENTS BEGAN TO DEMONSTRATE OUTSIDE CON-

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FINES OF THEIR SCHOOLS.

3. LATTER POINT WAS PARTIALLY REFUTED BY ISRAELI JOURNALIST WHO HAD WITNESSED DEMONSTRATIONS, WHO SAID THAT SMALL GROUP OF IDF TROOPS AT ONE POINT ENTERED GROUNDS OF BIR ZEIT COLLEGE IN CONTRAVENTION OF STANDING ORDERS. IN HIS JUDGMENT, HOWEVER, IDF IN GENERAL HAD NOT EMPLOYED EXCESSIVE FORCE. JOURNALIST SAID THAT SOME STUDENTS WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY RECEIVE FINES WHICH HE ESTMATED WOULD RANGE BETWEEN IL 500-30000, WITH EXPECTATIONS BY MIDGOVT THAT PARENTS WOULD PAY. (HE ADDED, HOWEVER, THAT MOST FINES IMPOSED AFTER DISTURBANCES LAST FALL WERE NEVER COLLECTED, SINCE IDF DECIDED NOT TO ATTEMPT TO FORCE PARENTS TO PAY.)

4. ALL THREE SOURCES REASONED THAT DEMONSTRATIONS WERE CENTERED ON RAMALLAH BECAUSE OF PROXIMITY TO TWO COLLEGES- BIR ZEIT COLLEGE AND GOVT SPONSORED TEACHERS TRAINING SCHOOL. WE UNDERSTAND THAT NEWS OF DISTURBANCES HAS BEEN CENSORED FROM ARABIC PRESS IN EFFORT TO PREVENT THEIR SPREAD. SOURCES ALSO AGREED THAT, ALTHOUGH STUDENTS CHANTED SLOGANS OPPOSING WEST BANK AUTONOMY UNDER ISRAELI OCCUPATION, PRIMARY IMPETUS FOR DEMONSTRATIONS WAS CONSIDERATION OF PALESTINE ISSUE BY UNGA.

5. COMMENT: FROM WHAT WE KNOW OF ISRAELI RELUCTANCE TO USE FORCE ON WEST BANK, IT APPEARS THAT STUDENTS WERE ALLOWED TO LET OFF STEAM BUT THAT MILGOVT WAS DETERMINED TO BRING DEMONSTRATIONS TO A HALT BEFORE NOV. 13 ANNIVERSARY OF ARAFAT UN APPEARANCE. ALL SOURCES SEEMED CONVINCED THAT DEGREE OF FORCE EMPLOYED WAS SUFFICIENT TO ACCOMPLISH THIS PURPOSE WITHOUT ITSELF BECOMING FOCUS OF DISCONTENT. TOON

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